

## **VI. INTRODUCTION: THE COMMUNITY DIAGNOSIS PROCESS**

The Community Health Plan for Chattanooga-Hamilton County is the result of a county-wide health assessment process, synonymously termed “*community diagnosis*.” The Tennessee Department of Health has advocated the development of a regional health plan for each of the twelve regions of the State of Tennessee using the community diagnosis model. These regional health plans, collectively, are to include provisions for each of the 95 Tennessee counties.

For this report, *community diagnosis* was defined by the North Carolina State Center for Health and Environment as “a means of examining aggregate health and social statistics, liberally spiced with knowledge of the local situation, in order to determine the health needs of the community.”

The benefits of community diagnosis (community health planning), minimally, are that it:

- provides justification for funding initial budget requests and budget improvement requests, for state-wide categorical health programs, and for special county-specific health or health-related initiatives submitted to the Tennessee General Assembly;
- provides state-level programs and their regional health office personnel with information that fosters better planning, promotion, and coordination of prevention and intervention strategies that target regional and local efforts;
- serves health planning and advocacy needs at the community level. Here, community leaders and local health department personnel provide the leadership to insure that documented community health problems are addressed.

The Committee for the Study of the Future of Public Health, Institute of Medicine, has said that “effective public health action must be based on accurate knowledge of the causes and distribution of health problems,” and recommends that “every public health agency regularly and systematically collect, assemble, analyze, and make available information on the health of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs, epidemiological and other studies of health problems.” Accordingly, regional and county health departments now are responsible for forming partnerships with regional and county health councils in order to address mandates by the Tennessee Department of Health.

The Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Health Council and the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department have fostered a partnership in completing a report on the local community diagnosis process, with the development of a